

U.S. Army Garrison Darmstadt community members gathered for a Town Hall meeting April 25 at 6 p.m. in the CLEOS building in Lincoln Village. The garrison regularly holds Town Hall meetings for all community members to voice any concerns or issues to the garrison commander and staff.

Lt. Col. David Astin, U.S. Army Garrison Darmstadt commander, opened the meeting with a reminder to register for school. He also reminded the group to put any bulk trash out to the curb that evening. Lt. Col. Astin thanked the group for attending; he then moved forward with a discussion regarding the special nature of this Town Hall, as a result of the recent USAG Darmstadt inactivation announcement.

The commander gave a short presentation discussing upcoming changes in the community as a result of force structure changes. He addressed many points, from scheduling workforce briefings for the garrison personnel, to working with USAG Wiesbaden on issues that will be shared in the future. Throughout, Lt. Col. Astin emphasized that USAG Darmstadt is committed to maintaining the best possible support throughout the transformation. He discussed sustained medical, dental, and legal services through the summer of 2008 as examples of continuing support.

Next, AAFES General Manager, Tom Gross, showed the community the planned near-term changes to AAFES services. With the departure of the 22nd Signal Brigade, the number of AAFES customers is shrinking, and traffic will only continue to go down. AAFES is also losing many of its staff members who are family members. To tailor services, AAFES will make the following changes:

- Darmstadt (CFK) Shoppette: New hours of operation 29 June 2007.
Monday-Saturday 0800-2000
Sunday 1000-1900
- Baskin Robbins/Vescovi Coffee: Last day of operation 29 June 2007. Coffee will be available at Burger King and the Shoppette.
- Burger King: New hours as of 29 June 2007.
Monday-Friday 0700-1800
Saturday 1100-1800
Sunday 1100-1800
- Anthony's Pizza: New hours of operation 29 June 2007.
Monday-Friday 1100-1400
Saturday & Sunday Closed
- Gas Station: New hours of operation 29 June 2007.
Monday-Friday 0800-1900
Saturday & Sunday 1000-1800

- Taco Bell: Last day of operation 29 June 2007.
New hours of operation 15 May – 29 June 2007.
Monday-Friday 1100-1800
Saturday & Sunday Closed
- Langen Shoppette: Last day of operation due to continued low customer usage 01 June 2007.

A community member asked Mr. Gross about changing AAFES services on Kelley Barracks. He replied that, for now, there will be no change to the AAFES services on Kelley Barracks. Nor will there be changes at this time to the PX, Theatre, or any other services not covered in his presentation. Mr. Gross noted that the changes in the Darmstadt community are on par with other shrinking communities, such as Giessen, Hanau, & Wuerzburg. He also stated that AAFES would work to adjust to the needs of the community.

A short presentation covering various MWR services demonstrated to the audience that USAG Darmstadt has been going above and beyond in its efforts to provide services to Soldiers and Families. In many cases, the garrison has provided far more than for which it is funded or staffed. At some point, the garrison will need to stop providing such a high level of service; it may come to ask more enduring units for assistance. Many services will remain up until the very end, especially those in Category A, such as one fitness center. MWR is also thrilled to offer Camp Adventure to Darmstadt children again this summer. Although Winger's and the Escape Club will both cease operations at the end of May, MWR Director, Dale Schmitzer, expressed her plan to offer some of the food items from closing facilities at MWR venues that will remain open. Again, the bottom line is that the garrison remains committed to providing the highest levels of service possible.

The USAG Darmstadt Director of Plans, Training, Mobilization and Security (DPTMS) made a short announcement regarding the upcoming Weapons of Mass Destruction Exercise, asking the community to be patient from 10-12 May. The exercise came up again later in the Open Forum, at which point a call for volunteers went out. To help out during the exercise, please contact Maj. Dan Hollingshead at 348-1530.

Open Forum

Q: Come this time next year, there will be major movements of personnel. Is the Transportation Office prepared to handle this?

R: USAG Darmstadt Director of Logistics, Ed Philmon noted that there had not been a problem to date, even with the surge associated with the departure of the 22nd Signal Brigade. He did not expect that next summer's movements will be an issue.

Q: How will the drawdown affect postal services?

R: Even though, and as the community dwindles, Community Mail Room services will not go away. At some point Darmstadt is likely to combine CMRs, APO, and Official Mail services.

Q: If we are part of a unit staying for the longer term, will Families be asked to move?

R: We want to minimize moving as much as possible. Those who are asked to move will be moved at government expense. DTRA, and the tenants of Dagger are waiting for appropriate work facilities to move to in the future. In the mid-term, one or both sites will be work sites only. The units will be assigned derivative UICs, which will authorize Families to move elsewhere, and Soldiers will commute to these work sites. There will be challenges, and although we do not have all the answers now, we will work through them.

Q: What happens to those who are scheduled to leave for the States at about the same time?

R: Again, the garrison will make every effort to move folks as seldom as possible. For example, we will not move a Family for one month, only to turn around and move them to the States. Units understand that there will be a lag in some cases. In other cases, we can keep people in Family housing in the Darmstadt community, but it may be w/ the understanding that there will be less/no services available.

Issue: A community member expressed a perceived lack of customer service skills around the community. She also wondered when and where transformation information would be available.

R: Lt. Col. Astin stated his regret upon hearing about any lack of customer service and assured the audience that the garrison will continue to focus on providing great service. He noted that much of the transformation information is already on the garrison website at www.darmstadt.army.mil, and we would welcome community suggestions to improve the information available.

Q: What will happen when stairwells only have one or two Families living in them; will housing be consolidated?

R: Moving is very disruptive, and we are going to try to minimize the amount of moves our community members endure. We will not move people if it is not necessary.

Q: What happens with maintenance for the grounds surrounding housing when we get down to near-empty stairwells?

R: The garrison will not be running around with a bullhorn telling you to mow your lawn. However, please do your part, and the community (DPW) will step up to help. Director of Public Works, Al Prucnal, explained that he depends on his Housing Chief to let him know where the gaps will be, and urged the community members to let him know if we are missing something.

Q: I was recently denied registration at another community's vehicle registration office because I was not from that community. Why?

R: Lt. Col. Astin assured the community member that this was a mistake; you are able to register a vehicle at any office. If you are refused service anywhere, please have the office in question contact the USAG Darmstadt Director of Emergency Services, Maj. Lonny MacDonald.

66th MI Group Commander, Lt. Col. Freeman added that, in general, the guaranteed location for services will be where the unit's derivative UIC is on record. If you choose to attempt going elsewhere for essential services, you assume the risk at that point.

Q: How will school busing work as the community becomes a work site only?

R: This is one of many issues that the garrison will be working on with USAG Wiesbaden. We will keep the community informed as plans are developed. In the meantime, for school bus information, please get in touch with the School Liaison Officer, Ms. Carralee Wood @ 348-6383.

Q: Much of the housing in Wiesbaden is under construction, waiting lists are long, etc. When do you think this will change?

R: 46 % of Wiesbaden's housing is unavailable at this time. This type of situation is why we will sometimes see e-dates shift and plans change. We cannot say how the availability of government quarters in Wiesbaden will change, but no one will receive orders to go where there is no available housing.

Q: Taco Bell and other food serving establishments are closing, and last week I was told that Kids' Zone doesn't do parties anymore because they are closing. What MWR facilities are staying open?

R: The individual that said Kids' Zone is closing was absolutely mistaken. The only two MWR-run facilities that will close for now are the Escape Club and Winger's. Both of these facilities are run by our higher headquarters; though we fought to keep them open, it is no longer feasible. We will make sure the workforce fully understands that all other MWR facilities will remain open.

Q: What about the banks?

R: Banks must request permission to close using a process that goes all the way up to DFAS. The Community Bank is currently planning to stay until June or July of 2008. Bob Isbell, USAG Darmstadt Transformation Chief, noted that ATMs will remain even longer than the bank branches themselves.

Q: What about the chapels?

R: Religious support will remain available. Following the final service at Kelley Barracks Chapel on June 24, the garrison chapels will consolidate services on Cambrai Fritsch Kaserne.

Issue: There are many infants in the community. As we draw down, day care workers are leaving, and it seems that there is a problem finding care for infants. In addition, it seems like FCC providers have irregular hours, which also causes problems.

R: CYS Coordinator, Ingrid Ruffo acknowledged that a number of child care workers are family members that are PCS'ing with their spouses. In addition, FCC providers are contract employees and do set their own hours. As such, Ms. Ruffo offered the opportunity for community members to help out by becoming child care providers. If you are interested, or if you have a special child care circumstance that needs to be addressed, please contact CYS @ 348-6105.

Announcement: Community members can find information in many ways: attending USAG Darmstadt's monthly Community Updates, reading the Herald Post weekly newspaper, getting on the email distribution for the Commander's Weekly Update, watching the Community Information Channel, attending Town Hall meetings, and checking www.darmstadt.army.mil on a regular basis.

Q: What is the PONDs policy for searching cars? Does it include rolling down windows?

R: In general the Random Anti-terrorism Measures (RAM) taken by the POND guards are not a matter of public record. However, the DPTMS stated he would look into this particular question for the community member.

Q: A youngster in the back of the room asked: When is school closing?

R: Principal Russ Clauss answered that the Elementary and Middle School year ends on June 8. High School ends on June 14. He reminded everyone that school would be open again next year.

Lt. Col. Astin ended by thanking everyone for their attendance. He advised community members that transformation will be a challenging process, but that the garrison will continue to support them throughout. The Town Hall meeting concluded at 7:25 p.m.